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"In Days of Shadow"

SERMON PREACHED BY THE RECTOR
SAINT LUKE'S CHURCH, GERMANTOWN
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

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Psalm 100, Part of Verse 4:

"His truth endureth from generation to generation"

Our hearts, these days, are heavily weighted. I would therefore speak quite simply, this morning, of some of the thoughts I have been thinking and endeavoring to live by, in the hope that they may help to strengthen your spirit, both now and in possibly even darker days that lie before us.

A prominent radio commentator has remarked that the few days of the week past seemed to him as an age, because of the tremendous events which have piled one on top of the other. Surely to this we would all agree.

For some time now, doubtless, it has been our common experience to feel, more and more, a sense of futility in all the little acts that fill our days. We think of the terrible things that are happening,—the destruction of whole nations; of carnage and slaughter beyond our power of thought. As we do our daily task, in shop or office or home, and pause to

think of what is going on at that very moment, we are almost overcome by the thought of the terrible and the trivial, both at once together. As the housewife cooks her dinner, thousands of fine youth are giving up their lives. As we sit looking at a movie, or listening to music on the radio, whole towns of people are being murdered. Oh, I need not press the point, for we all are wondering how we can go on with our tasks of daily life and work that seem so inconsequential and futile. Those whose lives are dedicated, as is that of a Priest, to service and the building of spiritual values, have an even added sense of futility, for all we do and strive and aim to achieve will be valueless, or would seem likely to be, if the forces of might and ungodliness should triumph. It is all indeed terribly devastating to the spirit.

But, what are we to do, and what can be said to help? There is one thing we must do. We must go on with our daily tasks. There are times of affliction in every person's life when the sheer necessity to do ordinary things is a life-saver and prevents the great sorrow from overwhelming. What is true for the individual is equally so for the group. There is great steadying power in these daily tasks. We can not resort to individual and thus to corporate chaos. We must carry on; and this gives not only a wholesome balance but also forms a part of the very basic confidence which is the inevitable and ultimate source of triumph.

And, may I add a word of caution? We must not anticipate evils. It is the fault of so many articles and reports heard by radio that, after stating the news, they go on to say that this and this may follow, and list a chain of terrible possible evils, and our fears multiply. In this conflict in which we are engaged — and let no one think that we are not in it already — the barrage of fear is a most real and effective weapon. It has tremendous demoralizing power. I most earnestly recommend that you read no articles, or reports, or claims, with Berlin as their source; but impose, if you please, a complete embargo of the mind, as we would against any evil thought attacking us. A good daily resolution would be found in our Lord's own words. We are not to anticipate evil, for "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And let us not forget: Faith knows that no situation, however dark and tragic, is ever beyond God.

For many of the women it would be a great help to engage in such extra work as Red Cross duties, which we provide here in the Parish, for this will do good also to ourselves and provide a wholesome outlet. It will give a sense of doing something to help when we chafe from a sense of futility and non-participation in the great struggle.

Of course, the greatest steadying power is prayer. Those of us who have had the experience of the noonday Intercessions, and, above all, of the offering of the daily Sacrifice of the Altar, know the truth of this. Whenever we touch God

and His Life we are calmed, comforted, strengthened, and lifted above the merely temporal into the power of that which is eternal. If we want to do a good work for the world, let us join ourselves to the victorious Christ as often as possible in the offering of His Sacrifice, and we shall not fail to secure for ourselves a renewal of strength amid this storm of life that beats around and upon us.

All this dreadful present conflict can bring home to us a very valuable lesson. We have been and are largely blind to the great strife and Armageddon which goes on about us always, — the great fight between good and evil. Every moment, souls are perishing in darkness, murdered by sin, and we have been ever too heedless, thoughtless and indifferent. What we see in the present struggle is only a part of the terrible spiritual issues engaged in our world. Therefore, must we not do more to tell those who are ignorant? Must we not give to them the saving Name that they know not and have never heard? Must we not pray and work more for the coming of His kingdom and righteousness?

Here, too, in the midst of the terrific circumstances, there is the value of the simple and the ordinary. The little routine acts of a life dedicated to God, faithfulness in prayer and worship and service, denials in order to give to works of mercy or to the extension of His kingdom, — all these not only steady one in the great conflict, but are the very basis of final triumph.

After preparing these words, I chanced to read, in an English publication just arrived, an article commending the use of frequent Retreats and stressing their greater necessity at this time. Let me quote from it, for it is wonderfully in agreement with all that has just been said:

" . . . the earthly war is only the evil and distressing counterpart and evidence of the spiritual warfare that for ages has been going on behind our material life and reaching such a stupendous magnitude in the spiritual region in these days. Lasting peace among men here on earth can only be attained by the triumph of right over wrong, of goodness over evil, of service over self, that is, of God over the wicked one. Therefore it is obvious that the spiritual warfare is of even more vital concern than its material counterpart in Europe and the far East. While seeing to the due provision of all necessary supplies for the conduct of this earthly warfare, it is nevertheless of more vital importance to maintain and increase the supplies of spiritual munitions, spiritual power, spiritual direction, with which the evil plans of our spiritual Adversary are to be foiled and defeated. This supply can only be maintained by our drawing nearer and keeping nearer to God Himself, for he works and wins His mighty victory through us His children."

Finally,—now and always, we must hold fast to the conviction of the power of goodness. Where does evil come from, and whence comes good? In the present days of all-but-overwhelming evil, let us remember that this evil is not of God, and, if it be not of God, it can not endure. It can not triumph!

*"Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong,
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own."*

There is more enduring, eternal power in the life of one good person, in one person in this congregation living a good life, than there is in *all* the works of the devil!

Much that we value in our world of today may have to go. We may see undreamed-of changes; indeed we have already. But, ultimately, good *will* prevail. Past human history gives abundant evidence of this. In the words of the Psalm, chosen for our text, which curiously enough, comes from the Jubilate or song of exultant joy, we are reminded that His truth endureth from generation to generation. Our faith and our knowledge of God *demand* that we hold fast to this conviction, for it is truth, eternal and of God.

The following hymn was sung after the Sermon:

*He who would valiant be
'Gainst all disaster,
Let him in constancy
Follow the Master.
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.*

*Who so beset him round
With dismal stories,
Do but themselves confound,
His strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might,
Though he with giants fight;
He will make good his right
To be a pilgrim.*

*Since, Lord, Thou dost defend
Us with Thy Spirit,
We know we at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away!
I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim.*